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CHOICES

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 1994

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The Summit of the Americas: A Latin American Agenda

Conservation by Consensus in Colombia's Pacific Frontier

Power-Sharing in Nepal

The Dynamism of Social Capital

A Divided Croatian Town Rebuilds

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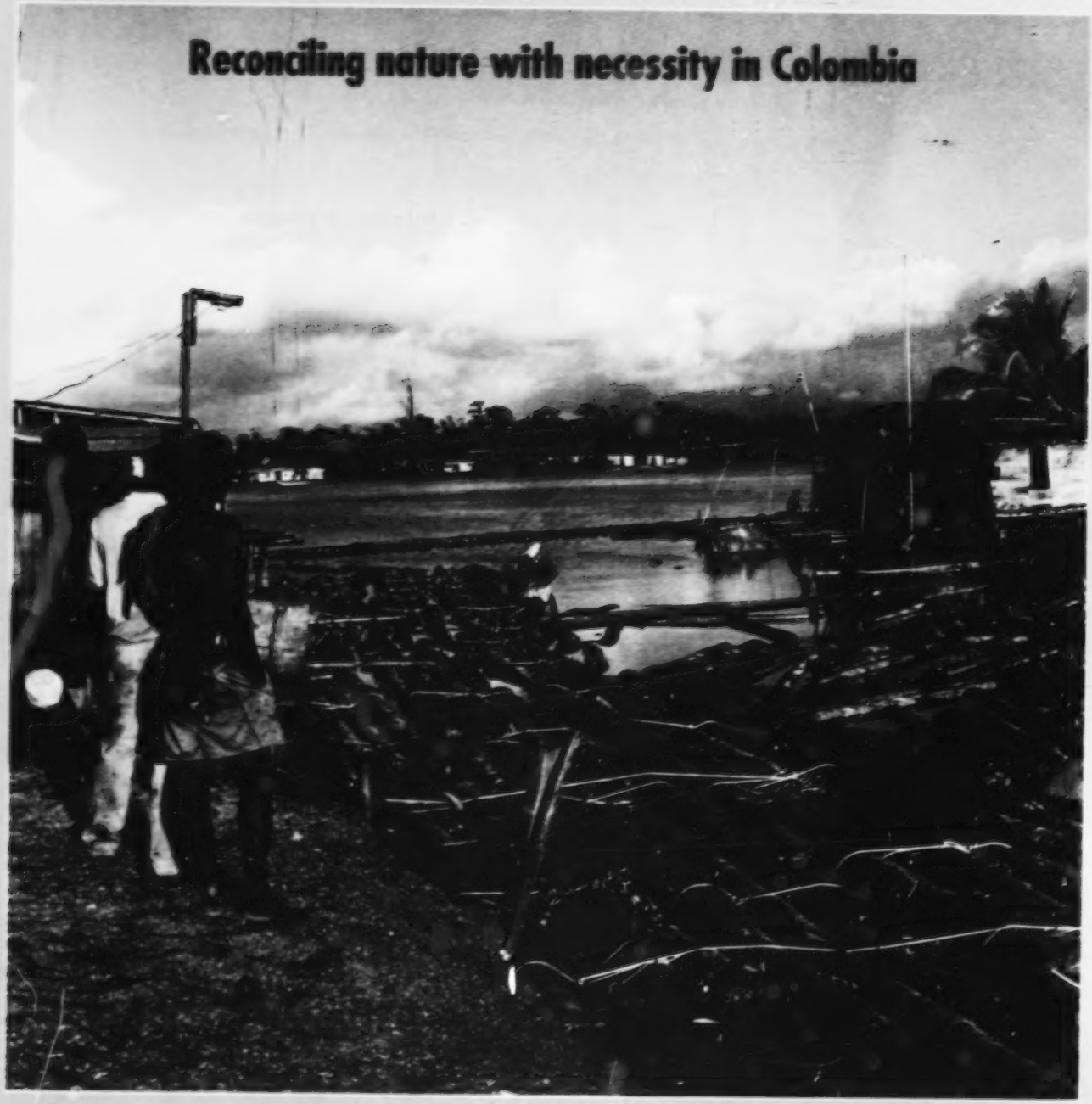
Reconciling nature with necessity in Colombia



DECEMBER 1994

Once again, the **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT** *challenges the status quo.*

THE 1994 REPORT SHOWS:

- **How ethnic and regional development gaps — like that of Chiapas, Mexico, featured in last year's report — are likely to spur conflict in other countries.**
- **How warning signals such as rampant unemployment, human rights violations and high levels of military spending can forecast Somalia-like "national breakdowns" elsewhere in the world, and why "human security" should replace "national security."**
- **How the poorest countries squander scarce resources on arms, and how the five permanent members of the UN Security Council may be fueling global instability by providing 86 per cent of the conventional weapons exported to the developing world.**
- **How development assistance has worked for and against the poorest people of the world, and why foreign aid by itself is no answer.**
- **How the 1995 Social Summit can be a turning point toward sustainable human development.**

The cover of the 1994 report shows the decline in global military spending from 1987 to 1994, which yielded a "peace dividend" of US$935 billion. Unfortunately, little of this has been directed to urgent human needs. If arms spending goes on declining by three per cent a year, another $460 billion could be saved from 1995 to 2000. How will it be spent? This will be one of the challenges for the World Summit for Social Development in 1995.

Human Development Report 1994
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See back cover for ordering information.

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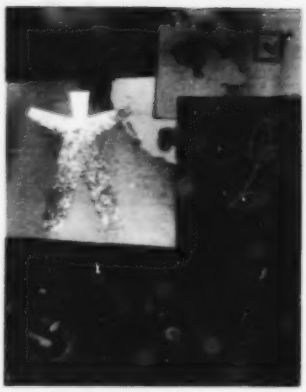

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A Meeting of the Americas

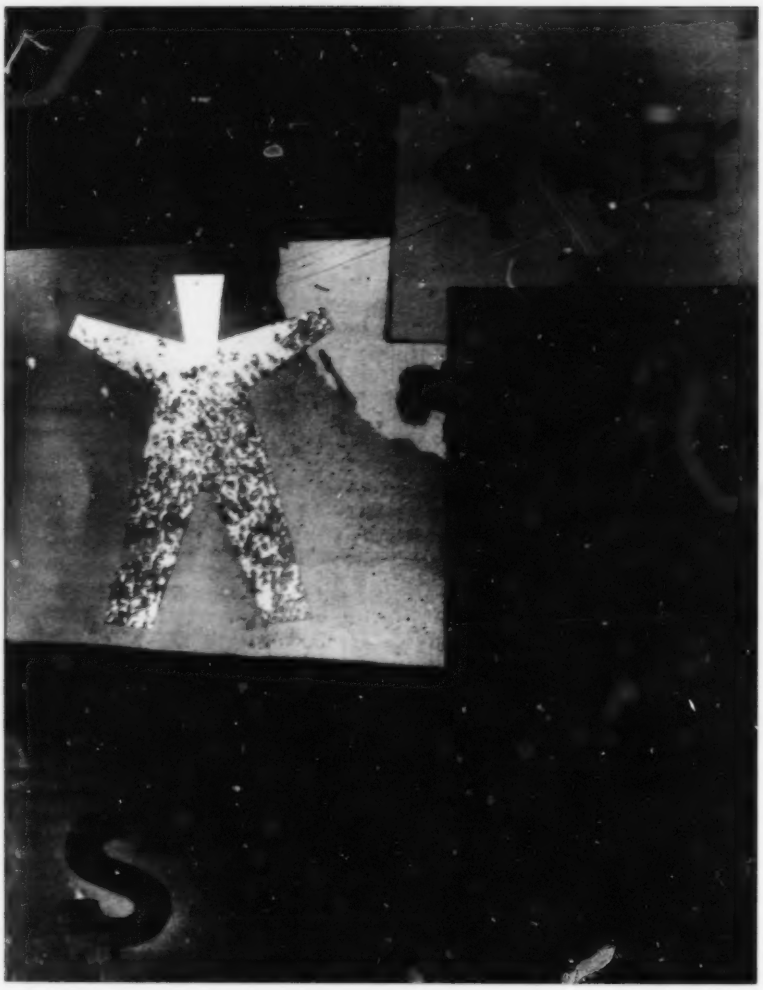


Illustration by Gerald Buchanan

The "Summit of the Americas," scheduled to take place on 9-11 December in Miami, Florida, promises to be an historic occasion: the first gathering of Western Hemisphere heads of state since the end of the cold war. It will also be a classic example of what is known in contemporary jargon as a window of opportunity.

If nothing had happened in the past few years but the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent loosening of the cold war's headlock on global politics, that in itself would justify some rethinking of inter-American cooperation. But a lot more *has* happened: A wave of economic change has swept through Latin America, bringing widespread privatization and trade liberalization and strong signs of a new period of economic growth. At the same time, many more American countries have installed democratically-elected governments, bringing hope of a permanent end to rule by dictatorship and military coups. A more active citizenry has organized into coalitions that are playing a crucial role in overseeing elections, fighting corruption and working toward more just societies.

The growing recognition that environmental protection and sound resource management are central to every country's security and progress is another significant change. Earlier declarations

A Hemispheric Summit in Miami — bringing together heads of state from the US, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean — could signal a new era in inter-American cooperation.

By Walter Truett Anderson

on hemispheric cooperation, however good-neighbourly their intentions, showed relatively little awareness of this. But in the past few decades, the brutal realities of soil erosion, air and water pollution and resource depletion have forced their way into the foreground of political and economic thinking.

New words have appeared in the vocabularies of political leaders and citizen activists: words like genetic resources, biodiversity, greenhouse effect.

For many, yet another change is summed up in a single word: Chiapas. The uprising in Mexico has come to symbolize the dark side of economic and political progress: the people – particularly indigenous people – left behind, the vast inequities of opportunity, the widespread poverty, the ever-present threat of violence.

Revolutionary changes have also taken place in information, including ongoing developments in computer and communications technology, and a whole lot more. Information has become a new kind of capital and a new kind of resource. It ushers in a "knowledge-based economy," that changes the structure of work and strongly links education to job creation and public health. The mass media take on an ever-increasing role and reach as people everywhere become aware of events outside their immediate communities. People find new ways to interact and organize to influence governments – and, sometimes, to bypass governments entirely.

Closely linked to the information revolution is what management experts call the organizational revolution – an explosion of new ideas about how to get things done in organizations large and small, public and private. It has brought a move away from hierarchies and bureaucracies, a wave of experimentation with teams and networks, a new interest in flexibility and improvisation.

Finally, there is globalization, a word that means different things to different people. To a business person it means global markets, new opportunities for investment and trade. To a political scientist, it means the massive re-ordering of international institutions that is taking place in the wake of cold war bipolarization. To an anthropologist it means an emerging global popular culture that invades, changes and sometimes obliterates traditional cultures. To an environmentalist it means the realization that ecological problems transcend national borders and threaten global security.

All of these forces – economic, political, social, cultural, ecological, technological – are, in a sense, delegates to Miami, ghostly presences at the conference table. They will, in various ways, demand to be reckoned with. Can the Summit deal with all this? Can it bring order, and, more important, practical plans for the future out of such turbulent times?

If the conferees do rise to the occasion, it will be due in part to the efforts of an unofficial body, the Latin American and Caribbean Commission on Development and Environment, created in 1988 at the initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

A new vision of progress

The LAC Commission, as it is known, is the same group that produced *Our Own Agenda* for the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, a strong statement that linked economic development with environmental responsibility. It also produced *Amazonia Without Myths*, which was excerpted in the July 1992 issue of CHOICES. This time the Commission's aim is to ensure that the Summit takes full account of the changes, dangers and opportunities that emerge as the world plunges headlong into the 21st century. Although the Commission is a group of 18 people with varying backgrounds (they range from Nobel Laureates Oscar Arias and Rigoberta Menchu to private entrepreneurs and NGO activists), it has achieved a consensus around a new vision of inter-American progress. The theme is "sustainable human development," an approach that integrates not only economics and ecology, but also social justice, an aspiration even more ambitious than the US goal of hemisphere-wide free trade and democracy.

In the words of one of the Commission's most prominent spokespersons, former Colombian president Misael Pastrana: "Development now must be concerned not only with the creation of wealth, but better distribution of it." He speaks in a way that ties ideals and pragmatism together, of the need for a concept of development that brings equal opportunities for all, and which has the possibility of achieving a workable, continent-wide consensus.

Another ex-presidential member of the LAC Commission, Miguel de la Madrid of Mexico, observes: "Democracy is not merely a matter of having elections and certain kinds of legal procedures and guarantees of human rights. It requires an economic, social and cultural substratum. If growth is not equitably distributed, or if growth takes place without concern for education, for nature, a system cannot be an ideal democracy – or even an effective or stable one."

More than a declaration

Commission members want and expect the heads of state in Miami to declare adherence to these principles. This in itself would be a significant achievement: an explicit recognition that present paths of development in both the North and South are fundamentally flawed, and a commitment to sustainable human development as the guiding theory of governments throughout the Americas. But such a declaration, however eloquent, won't be enough. As the Commission's founder, Augusto Ramirez-Ocampo of Colombia, put it during a drafting session on the report that is being sent to Miami, "There is an

unfortunate Latin tendency at conferences to produce eloquent statements and consider the job done. We need to have a concrete and pragmatic plan of action."

Commission members want Summit participants to acknowledge that fundamental change is necessary, but also to take steps toward realizing it. Toward that end, the Commission report, *Our Common Agenda for the Summit of the Americas*, presents specific proposals on poverty reduction, governance, biodiversity, energy and financing mechanisms, all of which are integral components of a hemisphere-wide sustainable human development strategy. The report does not call for the creation of new institutions, but rather envisions that most of its recommendations can be carried out by national governments, by existing bodies such as UNDP, the IDB and the Organization of American States, or through other initiatives emerging out of businesses, universities and civil society. It also calls for a timetable of future Summit meetings for carrying the work forward.

"If growth is not equitably distributed, or if growth takes place without concern for education, for nature, a system cannot be an ideal democracy — or even an effective or stable one."

Improving democratic governance

However impressive progress may have been toward democratic governance in recent years, there is still a long way to go, notes the report.

Some governments simply don't work very well: Elections are often mismanaged, with consequent losses of public participation and confidence. Taxes are uncollected, public employees underpaid, regulatory agencies inadequate, banking operations poorly supervised.

Other governance problems have more to do with justice and human rights. The news media, as everyone now recognizes, are a central and essential part of a democratic system — not just observers and reporters of the facts. The Commission calls for full freedom of the press, and equal access to the media for competing political parties. These are matters of national policy, but they can be influenced in many ways by international cooperation and informal programmes such as exchange fellowships for investigative reporters, editors and news managers.

The Commission stresses that vigorous democracies and progressive economies will be impossible to achieve without a strong role for indigenous populations. This is one of those areas that demands not only new policies and programmes, but a fundamentally different point of view. Here, the assumption being challenged is the indigenous rights-versus-development formula. Jorge Terena, a Commission member and a leader of the Indigenous Rights Group of Brazil, says: "We do not want to be obstacles to development, we want to be contributors — and we have much to contribute." Terena wants to see concrete evidence of deep rethinking on the part of many officials, who, he says, seem incapable of imagining indigenous people as active participants in anything. Specific proposals in the Commission's report include redrawing municipal boundaries to create majority indigenous electoral and administrative districts, guaranteeing access to bilingual education, clarifying and enforcing indigenous land titles, and expanding the role of indigenous representatives in the planning and policy-making of multilateral organizations.

The living treasury

Historically, the wealth of Latin America has been measured in minerals. But it becomes increasingly clear that the region is even richer in life, immensely blessed in its diversity of plants and animals. The ecosystems of the Americas are now perceived as resources for the world. The Amazon forests store huge amounts of carbon, a major factor in global warming. Wild plants from one country often play an important part in the agriculture of other countries — such as the wild corn from Mexico that contained resistance to a disease that was decimating corn crops in the United States.

Scientists are learning new ways to make use of biochemicals derived from plants, animals and insects, which, in many cases, have been observed and put to use by indigenous peoples over the centuries. One of the great ironies of our time is that, just as the value of these living resources is being understood and appreciated as never before, they are dying out at an unprecedented rate. Although the value of biodiversity is now widely recognized, that recognition has not yet been built into economic and political institutions.

Many policies still reckon the protection of biodiversity as a cost. The Commission proposes several programmes

based on a more realistic appreciation of it: sustainable forest management, guidelines for regulating access to genetic resources and other conservation strategies. Biodiversity protection must also include educational efforts, states the report: changes in the curricula of schools and universities, public education through the media and imaginative use of new electronic technologies.

"We do not have to force environmental responsibility down people's throats," says Commission member Margarita Marino de Botero of Colombia, "but we do need to find ways for people to get information and learn about practical things they can do." Marino's own contribution is serving as the director of the Green College, an independent centre that studies ecological issues and trains local citizens in agroecology, erosion control and resource management.

Sustainable energy development

Energy policy promises to be one of the most critical areas of development for Latin American countries in the years just ahead. Economic and population growth is expected to cause sharp increases in the demand for energy, and everything people do to meet that demand will carry a cost – not only the financial burden of importing fossil fuels and/or investing heavily in new technologies, but the ecological costs of dams and power plants.

Experience in North America after the 1973 oil crisis showed that it is possible to "decouple" economic growth from energy consumption. The LAC Commission report outlines a programme for a similar decoupling in Latin America by making loans for energy conservation and renewables as easily available as loans for conventional energy supplies. Other energy savings can be accomplished, says the report, by recycling, increasing the efficiency of vehicles and appliances, modernizing the use of biomass, and – one of the biggest potential winners – emphasizing mass transit over automobile use.

Financing

The larger concept that has begun to take shape out of the Commission's pre-Summit activity is a vision of hemispheric unity: a huge community of democratic nations, separate and diverse but cooperating more closely – economically, politically, culturally. And, although a hemisphere-wide free trade zone is not about to happen overnight, any thought of progress in that direction requires coming to terms with the wide disparities that now exist among the economies of the Americas. These are far wider than the ones that are being confronted (with great difficulty) by the member states of the European Union. However strong the commitment of the richer members of the hemispheric partnership, transfer payments alone will not be enough to meet the challenge.

The Commission believes that an energetic move into a new era of sustainable human development will require a wide range of fiscal policy reforms and investment mechanisms. It will demand review and coordination of current government funding and an expansion of the work of organizations such as UNDP and the IDB. It will have to seek ways of making sustainable development pay for itself. Possible means include capturing savings from waste reduction, increasing revenue from concessions, taxes on resources such as tropical timber, and ending subsidies for fossil fuels and pesticides. The LAC Commission report recommends a critical look at the environmental regulations that are being adopted by many developing countries. In some cases, these should be supplemented or replaced with economic instruments such as taxes, effluent charges, and tradeable emission permits that cost less to enforce and can generate revenues for funding sustainable development.

And, as economists and political leaders around the world are beginning to understand, and as the report points out, it's time to reform national accounting standards (GNP, GDP) to show a greater awareness of social and environmental indicators.

The open window

Right now the momentum of change in the Americas has the potential to continue in positive and productive ways. It is undeniably a promising time. But it's also a perilous time, with millions of people facing lives of poverty and deprivation, and much of the region's great natural wealth in danger of being irreparably damaged. That is why there is a strong sense of urgency about the Summit, the sense of an opportunity that cannot be allowed to slip by.

De la Madrid expresses this when he says: "There are real problems of equity, problems of the environment, problems concerning the indigenous communities. If Miami is only a gathering of protocol – if it does not proclaim the solidarity of the hemisphere, and real democracy and human rights, and does not go to the bottom of these problems, Miami will be a failure." He is speaking Spanish, and the word he uses is more forceful. He says a Summit that fails to launch an era of sustainable human development for the Americas will be a *fracaso*. ■

Walter Truett Anderson is a political scientist, an associate editor of the San Francisco-based Pacific News Service, and a fellow of the Meridian Institute, an international organization concerned with governance and leadership issues.

To obtain a copy of *Our Common Agenda for the Summit of the Americas*, contact UNDP's Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, attention: Ms. Emma Torres, Chief, Division for the Regional Programme, One UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017.

As Colombia designs a national environmental policy, its Pacific Coast region is laying the groundwork for a strategy on biodiversity that meets the needs of people who live there.

Conservation by Consensus

in Colombia's Pacific Frontier

Text and Photographs
by Sarita Kendall

Above: Women pick over usable wood scraps at a sawmill at Bocas de Satinga. Left: Indians at Turbio discuss territorial boundaries with a lawyer for Indian Affairs.

Quibdó — The northwestern Pacific Coast of South America is catalogued as one of the world's biological "hotspots." A humid land of extraordinary plant and animal diversity, it is largely covered with tropical rainforest and inhabited by Afrocolombians and Indians. The Afrocolombians, who make up 90 per cent of the population here, were first brought in as slave labour during the 17th century, while Indian civilizations along the Pacific Coast date back more than 2,500 years. The region has long been neglected in terms of human development, and now its biological wealth is in danger of being sacrificed for public and private investment schemes of little benefit to local communities.

The plundering has already begun, with industrial logging, intensive gold mining, plantation agriculture, shrimp ponds and roads that bring settlers and cattle farmers in their wake. Aware that a conservation strategy was urgently needed, the Colombian government drew up the "Biopacifico" project in the early 1990s and received a US$9 million grant from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to carry it out. The aim of the project is to launch a set of initiatives to protect the ecosystems of the Colombian Pacific Coast, which are part of the larger "Chocó biogeographical region." The Chocó extends for more than 1,000 kilometres, from the state of Darien in Panama to Esmeraldas in Ecuador (see map, page 12). Although Colombia is the only country so far to move ahead on Biopacifico, another $3 million in GEF funds is available for similar work in the two neighbouring countries.

Unusually heavy rainfall in the Chocó is partly responsible for the range and high proportion of endemic plant species – about a quarter of the plants found here are exclusive to the region, and new discoveries are being made all the time. Everything is exuberant, from the great shining leaves, bigger than a beach umbrella, to the deep red Heliconia along the river bank. There are more than a hundred species of palm trees, which people here eat or use as material in making houses, basketwork, toys, blowguns, musical instruments and brooms.

Birds, butterflies and frogs abound, some of which still await classification by scientists. Among the species that *are* known, some are in danger of extinction, among them the manatee, the tapir and the great green macaw. Also possibly doomed is the rich, semi-flooded catival forests of the River Atrato lowlands, which have been reduced to a quarter of their former expanse. There is still time to act, but not much.

The Biopacifico project got started in March of 1993. The first task – and perhaps the most formidable – was to win over communities that have a deep distrust of centralized government programmes and foreign cooperation. "There's a long history of failed projects in the Pacific," says Fernando Casas, the Colombian coordinator of Biopacifico. "It's slow and difficult, and we have to give people support so they can formulate and reach their own targets. Biodiversity is absolutely critical to their survival and it can't be conserved without their participation."

In recent years Colombia has been building a framework for greater participation. Several initiatives – the 1991 Constitution, the decentralization of public spending and recent environmental legislation, and a new law giving Afrocolombian communities collective property ownership – all open up new opportunities. Indians and Afrocolombians in particular will have more secure rights to the lands they have traditionally occupied and, presumably, a firmer commitment to looking after their own natural resources. Biopacifico is encouraging

such developments with the hope that they will help reinforce cultural values and management practices such as mixed farming, which are environmentally suited to the region.

The typical riverside house in the Chocó is made of wood and thatched with palm leaves. It stands on stilts just back from the bank, out of reach of floods. The house is surrounded by useful plants and trees, including oranges, guavas, lemons, plantains, coconuts, sugar cane, chontaduro palms, pineapples, gourds and medicinal herbs. Tied to the bank is at least one canoe, and hidden in the turbid water there is usually a cage made of bamboo for holding fish. Much is provided by the river, the land and the forest. But the people have other needs too – shoes, notebooks for school, cooking oil, saucepans, medical treatment – which they must pay for, and which force them to take more from their environment than they know is wise.

The project recognizes that people can conserve their resources only if they are given other options, and it is working toward this end. Yet it has already been fiercely criticized, both by residents themselves and by local organizations that had hoped for funds to carry out their own programmes. One question heard repeatedly in Quibdó is: if the project preaches participation, why weren't people here asked to take part when it was originally designed? To remedy this, the first operational plan was widely circulated among government, non-governmental and grassroots organizations for comment, then thoroughly revised.

The Biopacífico project is based in Bogotá – another example of centralism, say Pacific residents – but has appointed regional field coordinators who were chosen primarily on the basis of recommendations by local organizations. It falls under the overall jurisdiction of the recently created Ministry of the Environment and is administered jointly by the ministry, the National Planning Department and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A series of agreements with Regional Development Corporations, which are responsible for environmental regulation and conservation under the environment ministry, will help institutionalize Biopacífico, and provide logistical and administrative support in the field.

"If the environment is in a bad state, then so are we."

Four main areas have been defined for action: collecting information on the Chocó from sources inside and outside Colombia, along with field studies in the region; assessing biological resources and developing ecologically-sound systems for agriculture and forestry; building awareness of the importance of biodiversity among local communities and encouraging their participation in preserving it; and integrating Biopacífico's objectives and strategies into national and regional plans.

Early on, it was clear that one of the major issues would be the compilation – and intellectual ownership – of biological and botanical knowledge. The recovery of traditional knowledge and the systematic organization of scientific data on the region, which are central to Biopacífico's aims, have already begun. However, what was intended to be a dialogue between scientist and sage has already run into sticky arguments.

"First it was timber and gold ... now it is our biological wealth," says Alberto Achita, an Emberá Indian and leader of the OREWA regional Indian organization. "This could be the second great looting of our resources and knowledge."

Achita adds: "This form of scientific investigation does not benefit our people, but rather the pharmaceutical companies of other countries. Will Indian knowledge be recognized, and who will get the income if biological resources are exploited?"

OREWA was to sign a contract with Biopacífico for studies of Indian lands, leading to the demarcation of areas suitable for conservation, farming and other activities. Achita explains: "We want to define with our communities what resources exist in order to lay the basis for a sustainable development plan. We want to do it our way – respecting our cultures – and we have been working on this for years and years. But there is a clause in the contract awarding intellectual property of all this information to the state. We wouldn't even have the right to use it!"

Fernando Casas says it is understandable that the Indians are worried. "A new form of contract is being designed in consultation with UNDP, which distinguishes between the ownership of knowledge about biodiversity, which is what OREWA wants, and the biodiversity itself," he says. "This is important for Colombia. We need to ensure that community interests and rights are defended. There's an international trend towards exploiting biodiversity. We are in a key region and we need legislation – the project will play a role in this."

Downstream from Quibdó, in the Afrocolombian village of Tangui, the

Local flora.

Mangrove forests, an integral part of Pacific Coast ecosystems, are being cut down at a rapid rate.

More than 100 species of palm have uses ranging from basketry to food to building material for homes.

women say that a real dialogue is beginning. As a first step, Biopacífico sponsored a workshop. "We went out collecting plants and naming them and putting them in a notebook," says Juana. "It was not just them asking us what we know. We found out the scientific names and the way plants are classified. We collected stories and information about the plants, what they're used for. Some of us know about some plants and others know about different ones, so it's interesting for us too."

The women point out a borojó fruit tree nearby. "You can eat borojó or make it into juice. It's good for backaches and for stopping burns from blistering." A booklet compiling such traditional knowledge will be published and made available to schools; the plant collection itself is being kept in a herbarium at the university in Quibdó. A study of local production systems is also under way.

Like most communities in the Pacific region, Tangui depends mainly on fishing and farming – especially plantain, rice, sugar cane and fruit trees – and forest resources. Rodents, armadillos and turtles are eaten, though they have become scarcer since the first chain-saws reached Tangui. "The land is our sustenance," says Florentino Mosquera, president of the middle Atrato peasant association known as ACIA. "If the environment is in a bad state, then so are we."

The Colombian Pacific region, from the westernmost Andean watershed to the coast, extends over 10 million hectares and encompasses 83 municipalities with a total population of nearly one million. The coastline is a maze of tidal inlets weaving through mangrove forests; the rivers are highways that penetrate to the cloud forest of the foothills. Everyone in the Chocó seems to paddle or pole a canoe, from toddler stage to old age: children going to school, women wearing large straw hats with turned up brims taking fruit to market, families moving house, men going fishing.

It is an area too vast, with too many different ecosystems, for Biopacífico to cover effectively: in fact, many believe the project is too ambitious to produce anything but superficial results. One solution has been to divide the area into "ethno-biogeographical transects" for much more detailed study. The transects run from the Andean mountains through sub-Andean climates to the coastal lowlands, embracing several different social and biological zones.

A pilot project in the Citará transect involves the establishment of a regional centre for biodiversity conservation near the headwaters of the Atrato and San Juan rivers. The aim is to coordinate work among local government authorities, forming a network of field stations and researchers in the area. A comprehensive picture of the flora, fauna and ecosystems, as well as current and potential use of natural resources, will be put together with local communities taking part. In the Naya transect there is a plan to form a biological corridor connecting the Munchique Natural Park with the Farallones Natural Park via lands under concession to the University of Cauca.

Man-made changes have led to the expansion of the Sanquianga River, which now threatens to overtake the town of Bocas de Satinga (below).

Biopacifico is also interested in providing information to influence high-level policy decisions; a useful case study of the Darien region and the proposed Pan-American Highway route has been carried out for this purpose. A gap of just over 100 kilometres of road separates South America from Central America and would complete the connection from the tip of South America to Alaska. There is strong pressure to finish the highway despite the protests of environmental and Indian organizations and the spectre of social and ecological devastation wrought by roads in northwest Colombia.

The planned route, subject to an environmental study, would go across the lower Atrato wetlands and straight through Colombian and Panamanian national parks on either side of the frontier. These parks are well-preserved islands in a region heavily exploited by lumber companies, by coca and marijuana farmers and by cattle ranchers from Medellin laundering their fortunes. They not only shelter a great variety of animals and plants, they also provide valuable evidence for the study of biological links between North and South America via the Darien land bridge. The Biopacifico report pinpoints priority areas for conservation and suggests a different route for the road, along the Caribbean coast.

The Pan-American Highway is just one of many infrastructure investments planned for the Pacific. Others include ports, hydro-electric schemes and more roads, all part of the economic thrust towards the Pacific arena. Grassroots communities, although they are among the poorest people in Colombia, are ambivalent about such projects. They have already seen the ecological havoc left in their wake, by single-crop agriculture, mangrove cutting and the dredging of river beds for gold.

One particularly damaging environmental crime was perpetrated by a lumber company extracting wood along the River Patia during the 1970s. In order to transport logs to sawmills at Bocas de Satinga, the company built a 1,000 metre-long, one-metre-deep trench joining the Patia to the River Sanquianga, which flows past Bocas de Satinga.

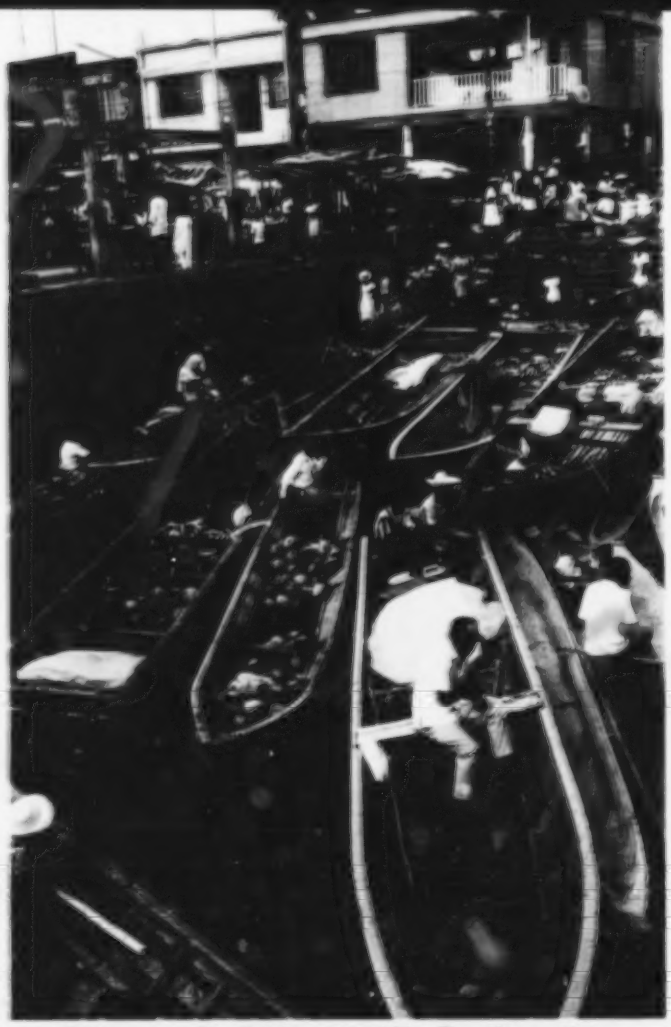
CHOCO BIOGEOGRAPHICAL REGION

Joe Lemonnier

"The result was that the River Patia changed course and nearly all its water comes down the Sanquianga now," says Georgia Castro, who had to rebuild his house five times as the river grew in force and width. "You used to be able to throw a guava across the Sanquianga, now it's 30 times as broad and we've lost most of our farmland. We have to live off the forest, cutting wood, and the trees we cut are smaller and smaller every day." Bocas de Satinga, a town of over 5,000 people, may disappear completely if the current process of erosion continues.

At one of Biopacifico's educational workshops, held last June in Guapi, a participant described the situation on the River Guajui, listing environmental problems such as diminishing fish and game, diseased fruit trees and erosion. "Our environment is still in a better state than on other rivers," he said, "but maybe people who've destroyed their environment live better than we do – they're not as poor."

However, another participant, from the River Micay, concluded that development had brought greater poverty and forced emigration. Referring to the proposed construction of a hydro-electric dam and a road, he said: "We don't want outsiders imposing projects on us. What's in it for us? The energy generated is for the interior of the country." This goes to the core of the region's problems: the fact that the dominant economic model in Colombia is extractive and the Pacific has resources to exploit.



Rivers are the highways of the Pacific region: bringing produce to market in Guapi.

Gustavo Wilches is a Colombian environmentalist and occasional consultant to Biopacifico. He has given talks to private sector groups, which are not as closely linked up with the project as the strategy suggests they should be. "The whole country must learn that the Pacific Coast needs its own special development models, and that saving the communities is an integral part of saving the coast, and vice versa," he explains. "We have to show businessmen that it's actually better value to save the region. And we have to give communities the tools to justify their position in economic and political terms."

Helping the people of the Pacific to understand and to defend the importance of biodiversity for their future is crucial to Biopacifico's success — indeed this alone would justify the project. Numerous meetings and workshops have been held all over the region; contracts are being signed with non-governmental organizations as well as grassroots movements and universities based in the Pacific; local governments are giving weight to environmental variables in their programmes; and appropriate education and training materials and methods are being developed.

Although the relationships between land, culture and biodiversity underpin the philosophy of the whole project, they are especially important in the mobilization process. During a June workshop in Cali, representatives from more than 25 popular organizations laid the foundation for a local communications network with biodiversity as a central theme.

Nearly everyone at the workshop spoke about land rights, ethnic roots, cultural traditions and home-grown education programmes; most of the organizations hoped one day to have their own local broadcasting system. The range of talent was impressive, from storytellers spinning yarns based on Pacific folklore to dramas and skits about social or environmental problems they face. All sang, improvising clever rhyming verses about biodiversity on the spur of the moment.

Like the communities themselves, the Biopacifico project is percolating with ideas at the moment when Colombia is in the throes of designing its overall environmental policy. "With a recent change in government, new legislation and a new environment ministry, there are new opportunities as well as complications," says Mauricio Ramirez, a programme officer at UNDP in Bogotá.

"Still," he adds, "Biopacifico is setting standards for other biodiversity projects around the world. It's blazing a trail on questions such as the use of genetic information and intellectual property. What's also new is the degree of involvement of the community. Other countries have been creating isolated reserves, cutting them off from the population. But you can't tell people not to use resources when they have no other way to subsist."

According to Ramirez, UNDP itself is also learning a lot from Biopacifico and the Guandal forestry project (see page 14). The two initiatives are to be more closely integrated under a formal agreement.

Biopacifico has had to be flexible: for example, aquatic systems were not included in the first phase, yet Pacific society is largely amphibian and water is essential to understanding biological processes. This has changed, and greater importance is also being given to the Andean watershed. The project is sandwiched somewhat uncomfortably between the local communities and government and private sector developers, trying to achieve a consensus on rather abstract-sounding subjects. But this immersion in the Pacific region's landscapes, peoples and resources will help lay the basis for a national strategy to conserve biological diversity, a process which, in Colombia at least, is off to a promising start.

Holding Ground: The Guandal Forests

Bocas de Satinga – Huge logs arranged in neat herring-bone patterns are anchored on either side of the River Satinga. Downstream, two men struggle to keep another 50-metre-long raft of logs out in the main current and drifting on its way to one of the 30 or so sawmills at Bocas de Satinga. A great solitary tree hung with epiphytes and creepers stands out above the jumbled growth of vegetation along the river bank, a reminder of how the forest must have looked 60 years ago.

The Pacific region of Colombia supplies about two-thirds of the country's wood, and efforts to manage forests at sustainable levels are being concentrated there. Over the next five years the government plans to carry out a detailed ecological zoning of the region, with loans from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, and to develop guidelines for the management of wooded lands. A project to conserve forests in the coastal region of Nariño, administered by UNDP and funded by the Netherlands and Colombia (the approximate cost is US$2.2 million), is already providing valuable practical experience for drawing up national and regional forestry policy.

The communities living along the rivers in the project area, which encompasses about 15,000 hectares, live mainly off the forest, though they also farm and fish. Small amounts of land suitable for agriculture lie close behind the river banks; beyond these ribbons of arable soil stretch the low-lying, often flooded forest known as "guandal," an ecosystem dominated by the sajo tree (*Campnosperma panamensis*) and, less frequently, by the cuángare (*Otoba gracilipes*).

Local high school graduates have been enlisted into forestry research.

If the guandal has survived so long despite steady exploitation, it is mainly because there is no reason to clear the land: the soil, too poor and badly drained to support crops, has little to offer peasant migrants. But high population growth – the average family has more than six members – combined with extreme poverty is putting ever greater pressure on resources. The project's goal has been to involve communities in developing ecologically-sound techniques for managing the guandal forests and to improve marketing of the wood, thereby leading to higher standards of living.

Luis Maria Palacios is one of a group of local wood-cutters working with the project. On an experimental basis, the group was encouraged to thin out a designated site by removing smaller sajo trees, thus allowing more light to filter through the canopy. "It is the opposite of what we do normally," says Palacios. "We've left the best trees instead of cutting them down. We understand it's good for the forest and our families – for the future."

Although the sale of the wood did not cover the cost (including labour time) of the operation, there will be long-term benefits. "The guandal forest is degenerating because the poorer trees are usually left. Before, the wood-cutters would get seven or eight lengths out of a tree trunk, but now it's more like three or four," says Luis Olmedo, a forestry expert. "This practice helps genetic improvement and faster growth. It's not possible to apply sophisticated measurements in these situations, so we use the criterion that the tree tops must just touch one another."

Research carried out over the last 10 years by the Medellin branch of the National University has made a big contribution towards managing the guandal forest, as well as improving agriculture, and the university continues to work with the project. Several high school graduates from the town of Bocas de Satinga, where the project is based, have been incorporated into the research team, helping to measure tree growth and decomposition rates, monitoring tria's aimed at improving the bean harvest and collecting material to

One of about 30 sawmills in Bocas de Satinga.

study nutrient cycles in the forest.

In order to reduce pressure on the forest and to supplement family income, the project is also encouraging mixed farming. Small changes in cultivation techniques can substantially improve productivity, and it is easier to show quick results in agriculture than in forestry. Ana Luisa, who lives in Gemboa on the River Satinga, coordinates a women's group which has done so well with a plantain plot that part of the profits have been used to extend it. Surrounded by several of her nine children, Ana Luisa says that the women are also saving some of the money to start a community shop.

Instead of cutting down all the trees before putting in the plantains, the women have left some. Mixed among them are fruit trees, laurel and seedlings of other trees. The idea is to enrich the ribbons of better land with fast-growing, valuable woods that can be harvested in 10 to 12 years. With a little more labour than normal, the quality of the plantains has improved and the harvests grown.

Up the sharply winding river from Gemboa, the project has helped the Eperara-Siapidara Indians at Turbio to grow plants used in basket-weaving. Instead of having to look for them in the forest, the women here will soon be producing their raw materials close to the village. With the support of a craft marketing scheme, they will also be able to sell more baskets at better prices. Rafael Chiripua, the Indian governor and a much-respected traditional healer, is enthusiastic about the project's help with a fish-breeding pond and a specially developed plastic bag system to save the chontaduro palm fruit from disease.

Despite the evidence of practical results and community involvement on many fronts, the coordinator of the Guandal project, Oscar Alzate, is most concerned about what he believes to be the key to the entire process. "We have to transfer some of the profits made in the final stage of marketing to the wood-cutters if we're really going to make a difference and raise their standard of living." As it is, he explains, the sawmills are only paying wood-cutters 86 per cent of what it costs them to harvest the timber, assuming a daily wage of 4,000 pesos ($5.00).

The Pacific region of Colombia supplies about two-thirds of the country's wood, and efforts to manage forests at sustainable levels are being concentrated there.

The wood-cutters find themselves tied to the sawmills in permanent debt – the mills help fund the extraction of the wood, which is usually done with axes, and then buy it at a discount. But even the sawmill makes a very modest profit of nine per cent; the big profits come at the next stage when the planks are shipped from the port of Buenaventura inland for construction and other industrial uses. To save on labour, the project is trying to develop more efficient transport systems (at present the wood-cutters make small trenches in order to drag the logs to the nearest river), and is advising and financing several groups. "They will gradually be schooled in the whole process of marketing," says Alzate. "At some point we will need our own sawmill. Then we can improve techniques so as to reduce wastage and also come up with new products."

Although the four-year project is nearly completed, it is making such an important contribution in a difficult field that there is strong support for a second phase. Moreover, Corponariño, the Regional Development Corporation which runs the project, is stressing community participation in other environmental programmes as a result of this experience. The Guandal project is widely seen as a model of the kind of work which should complement the Biopacífico conservation strategy, and is providing valuable information on biological resources and production systems in one part of the Pacific frontier. ■

Brazilian-born journalist Sarita Kendall is a correspondent for the Financial Times. *She lives in Bogotá, Colombia.*

Capital Redefined: Bringing in the Social Dimension

In the following essay Franz Schurmann argues that it is not governments that will solve the world's most pressing human concerns, but the "social capital" which results from people working together, united by a common vision.

The World Summit for Social Development will convene in Copenhagen in March 1995 with three key agenda items: reducing poverty, generating productive employment and enhancing social integration. While these words have a practical problem-solving ring to them, they arise out of the visions of "the good society" that have been driving the world's modernization and industrialization over the last two centuries.

But that visionary force has been fading throughout much of the world. In the North, as the "post-modernist" mood spreads, intellectuals – in earlier times visionary leaders – have turned against modern industrial civilization. For many of them, our current age is devoid of visions of the future, except those that are cataclysmic. In the South people eagerly pursue modernization and industrialization, but more out of a need to "catch up" on what they have missed than out of a sense of vision.

Global mechanisms for development and change exist that weren't even imagined a century ago. But little moral energy powers them. Moreover, the starting point from which problems are analyzed and approached is fundamentally flawed. Poverty and unemployment are conventionally thought of as "economic" problems, and social disintegration as their consequence. Since the days of Adam Smith it has been common to think of an economy as the "political economy," indicating that government policy is crucial to its proper functioning. In today's world, however – and as the problems of poverty, unemployment and social disintegration suggest – it may be more useful to think in terms of the "social economy," in conformity with the original Greek meaning of the word: "management of the household." Social factors – the bonds linking people – are just as important as government policy in the health of economies, large or small.

And it is "social capital" – emerging not from governments, but from the ground up – that is fuelling the most dynamic examples of social and economic development in the world today, most notably in East Asia.

One of the most remarkable examples of social capital at work is the current housing boom in China. Seemingly everywhere in the country people are building their own homes. Many of these homes would not be out of place in affluent countries. They generally have indoor plumbing, electricity, small gardens, pleasant furnishings. When asked how much they cost, people will respond, "somewhere around US$1,000." How did they do it? "Oh, some 25 or 30 of my friends and relatives got together and helped."

What got China's housing boom going is popular confidence that whatever political changes come about, there will be a future to look forward to. What led to social capital formation is a triad of factors: (1) traditional bonding through family, lineage, locality; (2) a readiness to work hard through a common recognition that "those who don't work won't eat"; and (3) a context, offered in this case by a reformist state, political peace, economic and financial opportunity, and a credible promise of future security. The first two came together in the context of (3) to form social capital. It was (3) that allowed the popular home-builders to develop their private (individual and social) visions of the future.

Social capital is a concept that holds that human bonding, work and capital are functionally linked. Each can be used to generate the others. Bonding over time creates community and tradition. Work allows survival in the present. Capital looks to the future.

In the last two decades, the power of social capital has

manifested itself on a monumental scale through global migration. Migrants come mainly from the South, but also from the ravaged countries of the former socialist bloc. The social capital generated by Southern and Eastern immigrants has helped revitalize city after city in the United States – from New York to Miami to San Francisco. It has been the bonding that holds these immigrants together, their hard work for often low wages, and their astonishing ability to generate capital to educate their children and start new businesses that have given many of these urban centres a new lease on life. With remarkably few exceptions, these migrants are among the hardest working people in the world. Wherever they go they create jobs, build economies, and show an extraordinary determination to survive. And in the fashion of peoples who have lived through great wars, they bear children as if to say to the world: we exist and shall continue to exist. Thus they work not only to survive but to provide a future for their children.

Social factors — the bonds linking people — are just as important as government policy in the health of economies, large or small.

Migration is not just occurring internationally but intra-nationally, especially in large countries such as China and India, where internal migrants are playing an important role in these countries' current economic upswings.

Social capital at work can also be seen elsewhere in the world, for example, in the Mixtec *colonia* in Tijuana, Mexico. Many Mixtecs migrated from their state of Oaxaca when exhausted soils could no longer provide a livelihood. The Mixtecs are well organized as a group and send money back to their villages in Oaxaca. But the real centre of their lives is the Tijuana colonia, a hill on which they have built an urban village. While they still have to cart water up the hill, their families live in small but decent houses. Their main investment in the future is an excellent school, which educators from several countries, especially Japan, have visited.

A social capital approach has also been used since the 1970s by Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh, who started up the Grameen Bank. The granting of small loans to the poorest of the poor, within the context of strong family and community ties, has proved a successful approach to income generation and micro-business development, especially among women. It is a model that has been replicated around the world, including the US.

Two centuries ago, capital was conceived of as the equipment needed to produce future wealth. Later it came to mean the money needed to acquire equipment and labour. In the 1960s the concept of human capital arose: the individual skills and education that were needed, in addition to financial capital, to produce future wealth. Today, the time has come to acknowledge the social as well as the financial forms of capital, in addition to know-how, needed for development.

Governments cannot *create* social capital. But they can provide a political environment in which it can flourish. Just by assuring real rule of law and maintaining good governance, the state can go a long way in bringing about economic growth and social stability. But it must also go further and seek ways to support the family and other forms of social and cultural bonding.

The increasing turbulence of the world, the rapid rise in the numbers of migrants and the social capital they represent suggest a special transnational role for multilateral organizations. These organizations are often uniquely positioned to protect migrant families, to encourage social capital formation through credit schemes and other means, and to assist these families across borders. Peace, stability and justice have to be built from the bottom up as well as the top down, at local and transnational as well as national levels. ■

Franz Schurmann is an editor at the Pacific News Service, which he co-founded. He is a professor emeritus of sociology and history at the University of California at Berkeley, and the author of several books on China and world politics.

Speaking of Family

As the International Year of the Family draws to a close, Perdita Huston reflects on its meaning, based on conversations with nearly 100 families in 12 countries. With support from UNDP, Ms. Huston is documenting her journey in a book that is scheduled for publication next year.

Peter Marzel

The Lagavale family in Samoa.

"Do you know any families who live in harmony?" The question was voiced in bewilderment by an elderly farmer in western Uganda. Like so many of us, he is puzzled by evolving family relationships and structure in a world besieged by rapid change.

One hears declarations such as, "The family, the basic unit of society, is disappearing," or "The social fabric is in shreds." Alarmist pronouncements, to be sure, but symptomatic of a shared anxiety. Pessimists may rant, others may turn a blind eye, but people nearly everywhere sense their societies are adrift. They question what the future holds for *their* family.

Recognition of this widely-shared concern prompted the UN General Assembly to declare 1994 the International Year of the Family. During the year we have been asked to examine the situation of families and the trends affecting them. More important, we are encouraged to find ways to diminish the stresses caused by modernization and development by devising family-friendly socioeconomic policies.

In both the North and the South family structures and living arrangements have changed radically in past decades, for a host of reasons. More democratic and less hierarchical relationships *within the family*, economic transformation, and widening gaps between men and women, between educated family members and the unschooled, between young and old, send shudders through family solidarity.

Demographic expansion has forced millions to leave farms too small to sustain new family members. Earning opportunities, whatever, or wherever, they were, became the goal of migrants. Increasingly women sought means to supplement family income inside and outside the home. Children's formal education became a near universal family priority. In the industrial societies, adjustment to these trends took several generations and was, in most cases, a question of choice. Not so elsewhere. In the South, people are deprived of gradual change; from one generation to the next the advantages and strains of modernization are thrust upon them at a giddy pace.

When one talks directly with families, their eagerness to discuss their changing needs is a constant. They tell of both positive and disheartening effects of modernization; they seek reassurance that they are not the only family in doubt, or worse yet, in disarray.

Elders praise an improved quality of life which has brought their families better nutrition, education, mobility and employment opportunities. Education is celebrated as a great achievement. That said, a feeling of vulnerability seems to perme-

ate the elders' views of the future. They fear, for example, that the education and mobility of the younger generation might result in distancing them, both psychologically and geographically, from those they cherish most. Housing is a special concern. Dwellings in urban areas are often too small to accommodate multiple generations. The elderly, who need the care of younger family members, are not wanted in cramped city quarters.

Life may be better now in a material sense, the elders say, but respect for elders has diminished. In the words of a Japanese octogenarian, "The elderly live too long these days. We're not wanted in today's society. We are smaller than the younger generation, we walk slowly, we have traditions we won't abandon, we get in the way... so we are not honoured in our late years."

It is true that access to education, global information exchange and urban life have contributed to a widening gulf between the generations. The young are more interested in radio, television and films than listening to grandparents' stories. Yet it is elders who pass on the traditions and values of previous generations, who teach the young the notion of continuity. If our social policies ignore the needs of elders, we risk a traumatic break with our past: new generations will be adrift without history, legend or legacy.

Traditionally, boys and girls were raised for different and separate roles in family and society. More democratic family relationships as well as education and information technologies have dramatically altered the aspirations of youths. Customary gender roles are becoming less rigid. Young women aspire to step beyond traditional home-based duties to contribute to the larger society. But how? They are far too often unaware of the roles to which women can aspire. When a group of Ugandan secondary school girls had each, separately, spoken of becoming a nurse, I asked, "Why nurse, why not a doctor?" One young woman looked at me in total surprise, asking, "Can ladies really be doctors?"

The new generation of young women, if properly guided toward productive and useful skills, can be a formidable resource for national development. But one must constantly muse: education, yes, but education for what?

The same can be said about young men. Growing up male was once a guarantee of power, prestige, authority and responsibility — in both family and society. However, for millions of young men, the traditional trades or occupations of fathers and grandfathers are no longer available or viable. There, where former generations were farmers, the family land parcel is too small to sustain another family; the young man has to move on. But where? There are no life road-maps to follow. On the contrary, there is confusion and sometimes alienation from the family. Millions leave the land each year for anonymous cities at home and abroad, a phenomenon that family after family spoke out against.

If these youths are to learn a trade and acquire a job nearer to home, once again, the question arises. Education, training, for what? Trade schools, rather than university-aimed curricula, should provide young people with skills required locally. And, say many families, education should also teach family and paternal responsibility.

In Mali, Mahmoud, a young father of two, is a driver by profession but has found no work. He is supported by his mother. When asked about his plans, he replies, "I want to leave Mali. I want to get out of here, go to France and marry a French woman. I'll get a job and settle there." And your wife and children? "I don't want to take them. They can stay here and get along somehow. I'm tired of her (pointing to his wife across the room). They'll manage somehow."

The theme of irresponsible fatherhood was a recurrent one. Time and again, families deplored the fact that, increasingly, male relatives are failing to care for their children and wives. The figures, often rising to over 30 per cent for female-headed households, reflect this trend. One is forced to ask what has gone awry. Why this confusion? And how do we correct the situation?

Taweesak is a child who takes his responsibilities seriously. He lives on the crowded streets of Bangkok with two other 16-year-old boys. They are his chosen, temporary family. They wipe dust off car windows at the intersection of two busy avenues, dodging traffic, returning insults and, occasionally, receiving a few baht. Tall and slender with long curly eyelashes, Taweesak has much to fear from sex traders who prey on boys and girls alike. He would like to be a carpenter and has found a training programme he could attend. But each afternoon his sickly and homeless mother waits at his street corner, expecting at least 70 to 80 baht to feed his siblings. Responsible for a family at age 16, Taweesak has no choice but to continue to dust windshields and sniff glue to calm his disappointment.

Teenage boys living on the streets of Bangkok, Kampala or San Salvador speak of their dreams of learning a skill through which they can earn a living. But for this to happen, training — whether in carpentry, simple electrical skills, automobile mechanics or construction work — must be free of charge and accessible. The millions of young people who abandon their studies for lack of school fees are the backbone of future development. If formal education isn't possible, training in productive skills must be made available to them.

In scores of homes, families spoke of the recent and rapid change in women's responsibilities, a trend that baffles both women and their families. Economic transformation has thrust women (and mothers) into the public workplace. The migration of men also means that women have taken on more responsibilities and decision-making. The global phenomenon of female-headed households speaks eloquently of women's plight. In some Latin American countries, half of all households are headed by women. In the United States, one-third of all children live with single, divorced or abandoned mothers, 50 per cent of whom live in poverty. But these women remain caretakers of the young, the weak and the elderly. That is a constant. Women who shoulder these responsibilities are subject to overwhelming physical and emotional burdens.

If women are to balance their personal and productive lives, family-centred labour policies and day-care facilities for the elderly and infants are prerequisites for their physical and mental well-being. Women's health is, after all, a centrepiece of family well-being. Although maternal mortality has been reduced significantly in past decades, millions of women still have no access to contraceptives, which allow the planning of pregnancies for the optimum benefit of mother, child and family. Health policies must be founded on the belief that women's access to reproductive health care is a human rights issue, a family health issue and a social development issue.

A disheartened 38-year-old Jordanian mother of nine was nursing her newborn

Photos courtesy of Material World: A Global Family Portrait. Thirty Statistically Average Families From Around the World, by Peter Menzel, published by Sierra Club Books.

as she explained her predicament, "I don't want any more children, I wanted to get an operation long ago to prevent it, but my husband says I have to keep having children. I've never even been to a doctor."

A change in male attitudes to women and child health, and to family size, is a crucial component of improving women's well-being. Without supportive and cooperative men, women have little choice and remain unable to participate fully in society's gains. Also, in the age of the HIV pandemic, sex education and healthy sexual practices are necessary elements of individual survival, community well-being and long-term national development. Until men take responsibility for their sexual behaviour – and women are therefore able to negotiate safe sex practices without fear – we will fail in our attempt to stop the spread of HIV.

Scores of families spoke of violence and abuse within the family. Indeed, domestic violence is a hidden terror which continues to inhibit women's participation in society. Alcohol and drug abuse are often named as contributing factors, as is a general disregard for women's and children's rights and worth. If we are to provide safe and healthy futures for our children, it will be necessary to revise, monitor and enforce comprehensive family law. The Government of El Salvador is doing just that. Its National Secretariat of the Family is reviewing all legislation in an attempt to create a more equitable Family Code that guarantees women's and children's rights, defines penalties for abuse and violence, custody and/or support of children and inheritance rights of widows and children.

The role of the media, especially television, in changing expectations of the young is a constant refrain of the family conversations. The concern is, no doubt, valid. Television also alters family communications, the time families spend together. A farmer's wife in rural Missouri complained that she couldn't get her children to spend time with her in the kitchen because she had only a black and white television set there; when she invested in a colour set, the children's presence in the kitchen increased.

The content of media is also a concern. It can be nourishment for the mind and society or it can be a pathogenic force. Wherever I traveled it was often the latter: Western soap operas, depicting the so-called "bold and beautiful," cluttered television screens. Young viewers straddle a complex world: one foot walks in tradition and custom while the other steps into a foreign fantasy world where conflict rather than partnership is the norm. It is a phenomenon that worries many who believe that alien ideas and values steer the young on a vastly different course than their parents.

Leong Ka Tai

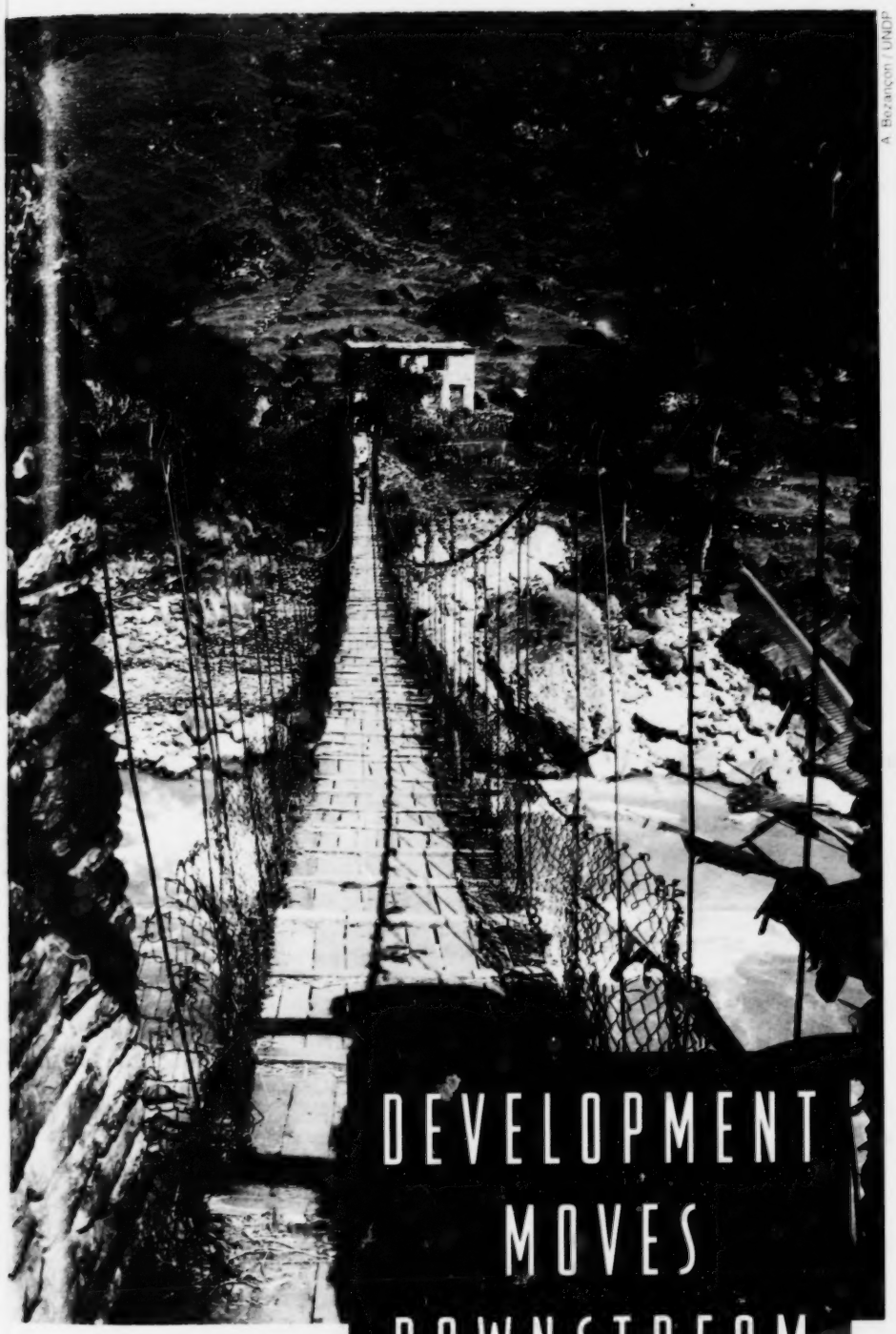
Many families say that television has fostered unrealistic expectations among the young.

In the Hui Autonomous Region of China, when asked if she watched television, a great-grandmother shook her head and replied: "It makes me dizzy... all those things and noise." The bejewelled satin-clad models from Hong Kong, parading before her, were indeed dizzying. The products they promoted are unavailable in the Hui region, but are coveted, now, by her grandchildren. Television programming aimed at the need for relevant knowledge, or training and education for the benefit of the nation, is in short supply. One leader who understood the power of the media for national development was Tunisia's former president, Habib Bourguiba. He discussed development issues with the Tunisian people via radio, week after week in the 1960s. He understood the potential of national information strategies that strengthen national culture and disseminate appropriate concepts of development. Why is it that more leaders have not done the same?

By talking directly with families, we learn that modernization has not brought the collapse of the family: it may be under extreme stress, it may be in yet another painful transition, but family remains the ideal anchor for young and old. Young people talk wistfully about building better, stronger families in their time. The family's strengths are formidable but so are its needs.

As the basic unit of our societies, the family needs far more attention from policymakers. Family-friendly development strategies should be the centrepiece of planning ministries, donor agencies and multilateral institutions. No, the family is not too small a unit to consider. It is *the* primary unit to consider. Our societies begin with the family: our rights and our responsibilities are first experienced there. If we ignore family needs in the planning process, we fail again to set development policy right. ■

Perdita Huston's work has appeared in dozens of publications, including The New York Times Magazine *and the* International Herald Tribune. *Her books include:* Third World Women Speak Out, Motherhood by Choice *and* Message from the Village. *Ms. Huston lives in Washington, DC.*



A. Bozancon / UNDP

DEVELOPMENT MOVES DOWNSTREAM IN NEPAL

BY KRISTIN HELMORE

After years of totalitarian rule, democracy has opened the way for decentralization and participatory governance in Nepal. Although the change is painstaking and complex, it has already generated enthusiasm and new opportunities for those it has reached.

Parbat District — A swaying cable footbridge is the only way across this deep gorge in north-central Nepal; a foaming green river looms far below. Then it is more than an hour up an almost vertical dirt track, made easier by rock-hewn steps and occasional stone platforms built for resting. Now and then villagers pass on their descent to the towns — to the commerce, noise and bustle, vehicles, electricity, indoor plumbing and paved roads of the 20th century.

Startlingly, the track ends on a plateau at the village of Pakhuwa, population about 3,000. Emerald-green rectangles of winter wheat alternate with plots of lemon-yellow mustard flowers and bare, brown fields of untilled soil. The sight of Pakhuwa is astonishingly beautiful under the deep blue Nepali sky. The houses are small, pristine, hand-built of smooth mud and painted in broad stripes of ochre, black and terra-cotta. Young girls in multi-coloured saris swing hoes from high in the air to loosen the soil, while birds chant a singsong chorus overhead.

But the farmers of Pakhuwa are not the least bit sentimental about their idyllic surroundings. Ganesh Prasad Rimal recently built a new, two-storey mud house for his family on land, he explains, that was useless for farming. Around his new home are barren fields, their brown

Kristin Helmore / UNDP

Barren fields in Pakhuwa.

clods of earth drying to dust in the hot sun. Indeed, all the bare fields in Pakhuwa – about a third of the arable land in this lower part of the village – have been left unplanted for lack of water. In Nepal, where regular rainfall occurs only from June through September, irrigation is usually needed to cultivate rice, the local staple, as well as maize, wheat and vegetables. Ganesh cannot suppress a look of disgust as he gazes across his unplanted fields. "Who would leave land barren if they had a choice?" he asks.

Farmers with no voice

Ironically, and to the frustration of Pakhuwa's farmers, the village is equipped with an impressive-looking irrigation canal, built by the central government in 1980 to replace an ancient and dilapidated traditional system. It was repaired in 1990 with funding from Danida, the Danish bilateral aid organization, with technical assistance from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and overall project support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). At the very edge of Ganesh's land a handsome concrete irrigation channel runs under the spreading trees, past the tiny schoolhouse and the Hindu temple and up to the plateau where wealthier landowners have their farms. But the stretch of channel near Ganesh's house is bone dry, and has been for many months.

According to M. R. Osti, a technical overseer from the Ministry of Water Resources Development who worked on the rehabilitation, "The farmers above block the canal. They remove pipes and enlarge holes to let the water spill out so these people down below don't get enough water." As a result, more than 20 farmers can produce only about two-thirds of the crops they would otherwise grow.

The irrigation problems of Pakhuwa serve as a metaphor for the centralized approach to development that prevailed in Nepal until recently, and that persists in many countries throughout the world. Traditionally, all development projects here, including Pakhuwa's 1980 irrigation scheme, were chosen, designed and carried out according to the top-down dictates of the old *Panchayat* system. (Indeed, the word Panchayat, which means village assembly, is misleading, for local officials had very little say in the running of their own communities, and individual villagers had no say at all.) Shri Krishna Upadhyay, a member of Nepal's National Planning Commission and an outspoken critic of the Panchayat system, points out two major defects of the system in a recent policy paper: "a highly centralized, top-down system of government decision-making, and the lack of accountability in the operations of government."

Under the Panchayat system, local organizations were often banned and their leaders imprisoned. The central government in Kathmandu controlled all decision-making, project design and funding. Like the water that fails to reach a portion of the farmers in Pakhuwa, the benefits of such centralized development frequently remained "upstream" – in the hands of government officials – and failed to trickle down to meet the needs of the people.

Pakhuwa's irrigation project exemplifies the lack of local involvement typical of the Panchayat system. When modern irrigation was first installed in 1980, technicians were sent from Kathmandu to build canals according to a plan they had drawn up without consulting local farmers. When the

"People should have choice in what services they need and in who provides the service, and voice to speak up if the service isn't what it should be."

technical experts left, the farmers – who had not been consulted, organized or trained for the purpose – were expected to manage the system on their own. The farmers in the upper part of the village proceeded to block the channel leading to the lower areas and to flood their own rice fields. After about two years, there was simply not enough water to go around, especially for the poorer, less powerful farmers of the lower village.

The decentralized approach

Examples like this one of development-gone-awry are common throughout the world. But for more than a decade, the Government of Nepal has been engaged in a dramatic (albeit gradual and painstakingly methodical) policy shift toward a decentralized approach – an approach designed to avoid just this sort of problem by promoting local participation in the planning, execution, utilization and maintenance of public services such as road-building, drinking-water, sanitary installations, electrification and irrigation.

The United Nations has supported the move toward decentralization since 1982, and in 1985 when the government passed a Decentralization Act, the UN sent advisers to help formulate rules for its implementation. Since Nepal's central government was overthrown and democracy proclaimed in 1990, the country's development plan includes specific directives on decentralization, which the prime minister has publicly endorsed.

According to Paul Lundberg, chief technical adviser of UNDP's decentralization support project, which works closely with the National Planning Commission, "Decentralization is a question of choice and voice. It means empowering communities to direct their own development agenda with the assistance of donors, governments and NGOs. People should have choice in what services they need and in who provides the service, and voice to speak up if the service isn't what it should be."

Although the evolution to a decentralized system is a slow and complex process, the increased involvement of district-level agencies can already be seen. In 1990, Ganesh Prasad Rimal and other farmers in Pakhuwa complained about the lack of water to the District Irrigation Office (DIO) in the nearby town of Kusma – something they probably would never have done under the old Panchayat system. As a result, the rehabilitation of Pakhuwa's irrigation system was taken up in 1990 with international support. Unfortunately, according to Mr. Osti of the DIO, the original irrigation scheme was so poorly designed that it was impossible to correct all the problems. "Now it's a bit better," says Ganesh diplomatically, "but not completely good."

If the problems of Pakhuwa can be summed up in the phrase "irrigation without representation," a possible model for a more effective approach may be found in another village across the steep river valley, and might be described as "irrigation through participation."

Getting it right the first time

The even smaller, poorer village of Marangsingh has a population of about 2,100 people – most of whom are illiterate – and almost no flat land at all. Its snug mud houses cling precariously to a tall, steep hillside. Small, terraced farms have been carved from the hillside, which is criss-crossed with remnants of old stone walls, ruins of ancient irrigation systems and crumbling steps installed to provide a foothold where the ground is nearly vertical. From the village heights, the whole world seems to spread out far below, the steep green folds of distant hills sculpted into neat rows of farm terraces like pleats in velvet. According to tradition, the Hindu gods keep watch over it all from the jagged, snow-covered Himalayan peaks that tower behind the village.

The farms in Marangsingh can produce only rain-fed crops such as millet and corn, and the lack of vegetables in the diet is reflected in the straw-like yellow hair of some of the children. Until recently, clean drinking water was unavailable, and sanitation facilities were practically unknown.

Marangsingh may not have much, but it does have Nila Kantsha Poudel, a locally-elected leader who is determined to get things done, meet the people's needs and transform his community. It also has a dynamic Farmers Irrigation Association whose members are being trained to build, maintain and manage appropriate systems. And high up at the very top of the village it has a large square tank recently dug by the farmers themselves – or, more precisely, by their wives. With all these assets, Marangsingh seems to be moving ahead.

Poudel is a tall, gaunt former school teacher with a mischievous smile and a curly grey beard. He appears to be in his late 50s, but is in fact only 33. Perhaps his early years in a banned student union and in Nepal's underground Congress Party, before the establishment of multi-party democracy, aged him prematurely. When the

Close involvement in this irrigation project has completely changed the viewpoint of farmers like Chettri.

first local elections were held in 1992, Poudel was elected chairman of the Village Development Committee for Marangsingh. His campaign promise? To supply irrigation to the upper part of the village, and drinking water to the lower areas where the low-caste, Damai families live.

In an unusual switch for a politician – but in keeping with the policy of decentralization and of donors like Danida and the UN – Poudel decided to focus first on providing drinking water and latrines to the most disadvantaged members of the community. A French non-governmental organization, Amis Médicaux Sanitaires, agreed to install the drinking water system using local labour, provided latrines were dug as well.

Poudel and other members point out an interesting characteristic of the new, "decentralized" Village Development Committee: nine of its 11 members were part of the old Panchayat assembly. On the surface, therefore, it would appear that little has changed. But Poudel is quick to correct this impression. Turning to the issue of irrigation, he explains that in the past, the District Irrigation Office was funded exclusively by the central-level Department of Irrigation, and could carry out only those projects outlined in Kathmandu. But under the new system, Poudel and the villagers of Marangsingh were able to approach the district officer directly for help with their irrigation system, and work directly with foreign donors. The District Development Committee (an umbrella body for village committees and an important link in the decentralization chain) helped them draft their proposal, and Danida, ILO and UNDP agreed to assist through the same project that repaired the system in Pakhuwa. Kathmandu was not involved at all. Thanks to decentralization, the donors could avoid the financial quicksand often encountered when dealing with government bureaucracies and work directly with the District Irrigation Office. Asked if such projects were undertaken in Marangsingh under the old Panchayat system, Nila Kantsha sneers and shakes his head.

Farmer-managed irrigation

Perhaps the most convincing indicator of success for Marangsingh's nearly-completed irrigation system is the Farmers Irrigation Association, which was created according to the requirements of Danida and the ILO as a prerequisite for their support. Recognizing that a strong, active local organization is essential for sustainability, the donors stipulated that they would only work through such organizations, and they recruited a social organizer, Krishna Lamichani, from a local NGO to help set one up.

It was the farmers' association that organized local labour to rebuild the drinking water system and dig the latrines, as well as to dig the 144-cubic-metre tank for the irrigation system. The association will also establish fees for water users to pay for the upkeep of the irrigation system. ILO engineers are training 12 farmers in irrigation techniques so that they can become skilled labourers and work on similar projects in other communities. But perhaps most important, in light of the pitfalls encountered in Pakhuwa, members of the farmers' association are guiding the project design and advising the district technicians every step of the way. The farmers' association can stop the project and withhold payment to the contractors if they judge that the work is not being done correctly. "If the farmers don't supervise," says Krishna Lamichani, "you get mistakes."

A. Bezançon / UNDP

Local labourers discuss next steps in a road-building project in Pokhara.

Once the system is in place, the farmers' association will appoint a "water-master" – most likely a landless person who will live near the tank with his family – to regulate the flow of water into and out of the tank. "He can grab a thief," exults Krishna Lamichani, "and tell the association who thieves the water."

"And if for some reason the water-master is not there," says Baburam Chettri, a member of the farmers' association, "we'll

TURNING POWER POLITICS UPSIDE DOWN

In April 1990, a people's movement in Nepal forced the abrupt dissolution of totalitarian rule and began the shift toward a more open, democratic society. Some six months later, an interim government created a new Constitution that defined the state's main responsibility as maximizing the participation of people in governing the country.

Multi-party elections for Parliament were held in May 1991 for the first time in 36 years. Parliament then passed bills on local governance, and Nepal's 45,000 villages elected local representatives to Village Development Committees. As a further link in the chain of power-sharing, these local representatives then elected the chairmen of 75 District Development Committees from their own peers.

In contrast to the old Panchayat system, a democratic process is supposed to ensure that development projects are in the interest of the greatest number of people. Development priorities are identified by villagers themselves. Village committee plans are then submitted to district committees for approval, technical support and access to funding.

According to UNDP's Paul Lundberg, it is a theory that has strong political backing in practice. "The district committees actually seem to want to empower local people," he says. "They see it as an adroit political move. They understand that by enabling people to do things on their own, they are encouraging people to vote for them."

One of the most dynamic of Nepal's District Development Committee chairmen is Ram Chandra Pokhrel. A former high school headmaster and activist since 1960 in the Nepali Congress Party, Pokhrel was debarred from public speaking under the old regime and jailed on a number of occasions.

The impact of the shift to democracy on a man like Ram Chandra Pokhrel has been enormous. "During the Panchayat time we were not free," he explains. "There was no responsible government and no spontaneous development. If there was development in a village, it was directed from the district.

"In former days," he continues, "most development money was not spent properly. On a Rs. 100,000 road project, for example, 60 per cent of the budget would go to 'the other side' — for corruption. The accounts were always closed. Now they are open. Everyone knows how the money is spent."

Pokhrel's district of Tanahun, with a total population of 300,000 in 46 villages, is one of six districts that are receiving help from the UNDP-funded decentralization support project. To help the districts gather data, prioritize development needs, and design and budget projects, UNDP is providing computers as well as training in data-collection, social surveys, accounting and bookkeeping. In addition to direct support to local government, the project is also assisting the National Planning Commission in overall policy development.

According to Pokhrel, the development process in Tanahun District is following a decidedly "bottom-up" approach. First, groups of villagers assemble to discuss common needs and present their ideas to the Village Development Committee (VDC) chairman. The VDC then submits their priorities to district committee members, who rank the projects according to the number of people who will benefit from them, the estimated cost and the availability of funds. Money for such projects can be found through direct contact with foreign donors, as well as from the central government and through such locally-based means as land taxes. Often, villagers carry the decentralization philosophy even further when local associations or development committees approach foreign donors directly, bypassing assistance and supervision at the district level.

"When I came into office I decided that Tanahun District should be a model of local development," says Pokhrel proudly. "For example, we built nine kilometres of road up a rock cliff with Rs. 200,000 ($4,081). People donated the labour, and the engineer's salary was paid by the Ministry of Roads."

Pokhrel lists six priority sectors that have been identified by villagers in his district: clean drinking water, literacy, self-sufficiency in food grains, a health post for every village, a motorable dirt track linking every village to a main road, and income-generation, including access to credit. His schemes are ambitious, and resources are limited, but Pokhrel is not deterred. "We use our own limited means as much as we can," he says. For example, to impart literacy in a district where 60 per cent of the population cannot read or write is a daunting task. Pokhrel's solution is the "Each One Teach One" method, where every literate person undertakes to teach at least one other person to read and write every year. (Pokhrel says he himself taught five people to read last year.)

To obtain drinking water, local villagers are willing to dig their own reservoirs; they also repair irrigation systems (with technical guidance when necessary). The committee has convinced the Agricultural Development Bank to provide soft loans to small-scale farmers, including women. It has organized a goat-loan project in which farmers who receive a goat pass on the first-born female offspring to another farmer. When a District Development Committee is well organized, says Pokhrel, access to technical assistance from NGOs or government agencies is not hard to come by.

And while basic literacy has received a boost from the "Each One Teach One" programme, computer literacy is also having an impact on development. "The decentralization project supplied hardware for our information centre," say Pokhrel. "It showed us planning methodologies, and taught us how to get people involved. Development in the past was not effective," he adds. "Now we are moving to remote villages that used to be entirely deprived. And we are giving other villages the means to go even further." — **K.H.**

Foreign donors are already finding decentralization to be an incentive to invest in locally-based projects in Nepal.

all come together to guard the water."

Indeed, close involvement in this irrigation project has completely changed the viewpoint of farmers like Chettri. Where before a sense of impotence and apathy prevailed, he now has big plans for the future. "I want to go door to door to convince people to dig latrines and keep the land around their houses clean," he says. "After that, the village needs electricity and a mule trail linking us to the main road."

"In the old days," he says, "I used to think about changes that were needed, but I couldn't do anything about them. Now I see that it's possible for farmers like me to make things happen."

Great expectations in Kathmandu

As is often the case in a capital city, the view of the decentralization process from Singha Durbar – Kathmandu's gleaming white, Nepalese-baroque government palace – is somewhat different from that of small mountain villages like Pakhuwa and Marangsingh. Mr. Upadhyay of the National Planning Commission is positively radiant when he speaks of the new approach, and buoyantly optimistic about its prospects. He looks forward to the day when associations of villagers will be the direct "clients" of international development organizations; when funding will be generated at the district level through land taxes and labour contributions and through "soft" loans provided by the central government. He is particularly enthusiastic about the financial benefits of a decentralized approach to development in connection with such pressing infrastructure needs as road-building.

"Nepal has the lowest road density in South Asia," he explains. "The only way we can afford to increase the number of secondary, unpaved roads is to involve the people. If you use the central government to build roads it costs Rs. 1 million (US$20,400) per kilometre. If you use people it costs between Rs. 50,000 and Rs. 100,000 ($1,020 to $2,040) per kilometre because you are not using any contractors. The mobilization of labour is done by the community.

Upadhyay sees another advantage to the economic benefits of decentralization: leverage to encourage reluctant bureaucrats at the ministry level to embrace the new system. "There is not much resistance to decentralization at the political level," he says. "But at the bureaucratic level people still want to be in charge. So we study their programmes and see the cost. Then we tell the bureaucrats, 'Your costs are high, and your programmes are not effective.'"

Under Nepal's newly democratic system, Upadhyay sees the role of the government as encouraging local entrepreneurs to provide the services people want. "In the past," he says, "only the government provided biogas technology. Now there are seven companies doing it. Decentralization is not taking place in a vacuum. Democracy, liberalization of the economy, privatization are all part of it."

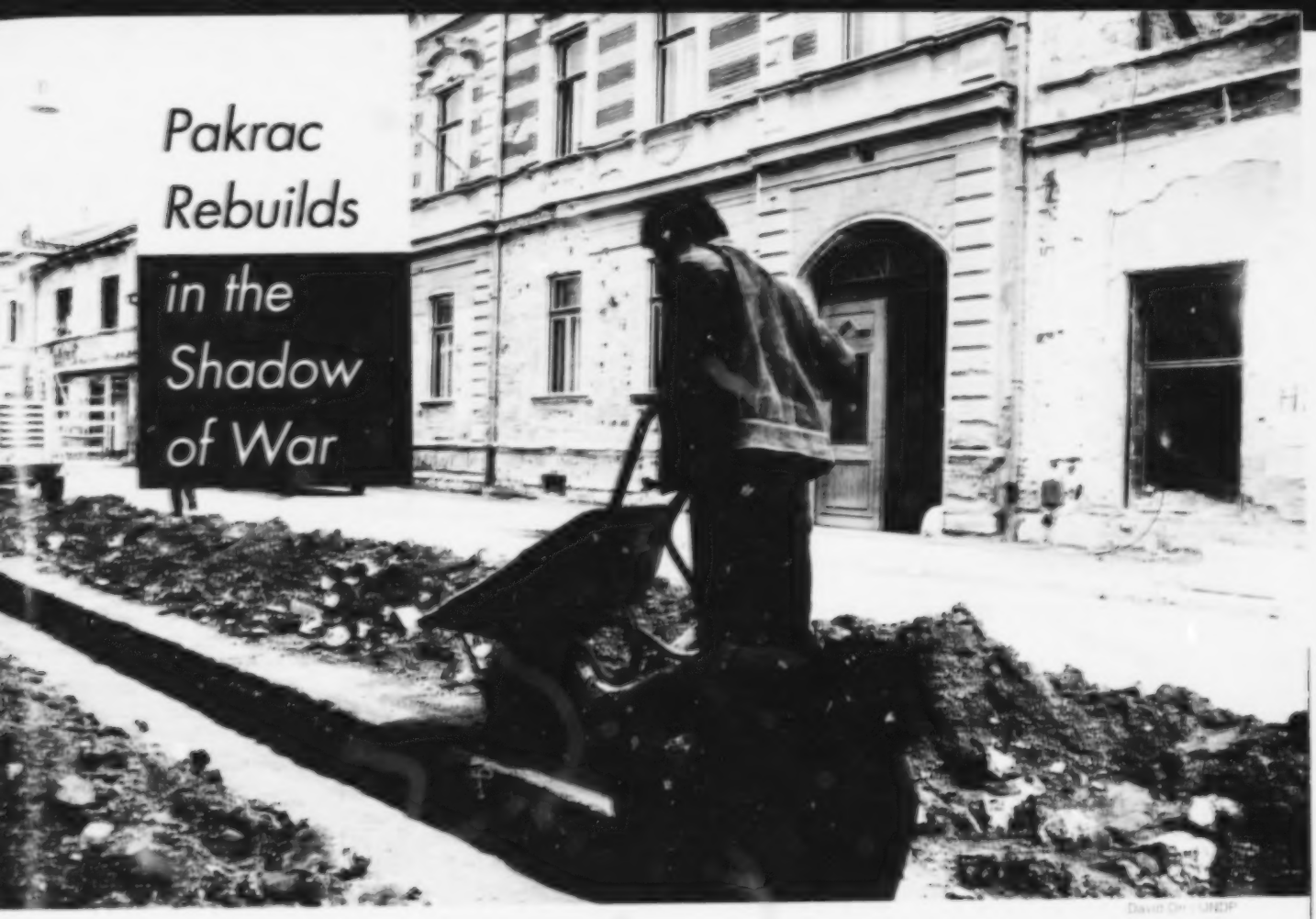
Foreign donors are already finding decentralization to be an incentive to invest in locally-based projects in Nepal. The Asian Development Bank (ADB), for example, is involved in a road-building project that will provide remote communities with access to markets. "Decentralization has encouraged us to do this type of project," says A. G. Nasution, chief of the ADB in Kathmandu. "We are interested in supporting projects in which the people are participating, and decentralization should strengthen village-level development organizations."

To Upadhyay's way of thinking, the decentralization process in Nepal can only succeed in a democratic environment. "Without political change and pluralistic democracy," he says, "decentralization would be impossible.

"What kind of development model do you want to follow?" he asks, "the costly, top-down model or the community-based model where it's cheaper and where there's a sense of ownership which brings sustainability?" ■

Kristin Helmore, former editor of African Farmer, *is a freelance journalist based in the US.*

Pakrac Rebuilds in the Shadow of War



As political negotiations on the former Yugoslavia continue, a social reconstruction programme in Croatia is seeking to restore confidence in a town shattered by war and ethnic division.

By David Orr

– Bars do not come much closer to a frontline than the "Cesma" in Pakrac. It lies just 50 metres beyond the UN checkpoint that separates the Croat and Serb sides of this small Croatian town. The Serbian folk music on the jukebox and the photograph on the wall of the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, leave no doubt as to what part of town you are in.

There has been no fighting in Pakrac since the arrival here in the summer of 1992 of UNPROFOR, the UN Protection Force in former Yugoslavia. But the Argentine soldiers at the checkpoint are taking no chances. They wear bullet-proof vests and carry their automatic weapons slung over their shoulders. The guard hut is sandbagged, there are coils of barbed wire and cement-filled oil drums on either side of the barrier.

The terrace of the Cesma is a good place for an orientation after one arrives here. Beyond the checkpoint looking north you can see the shell of the Serb Orthodox Church and, a little further on, the pink tower of the ruined (Croatian) Catholic Church, both on the Croat side.

Behind you is the Serb-controlled section of Pakrac, known as Gavrinica. To the east stretches Stanivukoviceva, a street of shelled and burned-out houses in which only three Serb families remain. To the west is another road winding up into Gavrinica itself. Above the road is a hill, but the red and white tape running along the roadside warns you not to stray too far: there are mines here and people are still being killed.

There is not one house in the whole of Pakrac whose walls have not been battered by artillery shells or pockmarked by bullets; not one building whose windows have not been blasted out or whose roof has not been smashed in. The less damaged homes show signs of life – clucking chickens or neat piles of logs in the front yard – but many are deserted, fallen ma-

Local inhabitants and international volunteers are helping to reconstruct war-damaged areas of Pakrac.

"The reconstruction programme enables people to think about work and how to create something for the future."

sonry in their doorways, their window frames blackened by fire.

The town of Pakrac is mostly in Croat hands; only the hills and Gavrinica are held by the Serbs. No inhabitant may cross from one side to the other.

Adapted from United Nations map no. 3740

Joe Lemonnier

akrac lies on a fault line of hatred and distrust that now runs through the very heart of Croatia. Its inhabitants will tell you openly that they are unsure whether the two communities can ever live together again. Too many people died in the 1991-92 war, too many homes were destroyed and too many families were driven out for forgiveness to be easily granted.

Yet some semblance of normal life is beginning to return. People displaced by the war have trickled back to their homes and are picking up the pieces of their shattered lives.

It was to encourage this process of normalization that, in 1992, the United Nations Office in Vienna (UNOV), with seed money from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), launched a social reconstruction programme in Pakrac and in a number of other towns in Sector West (one of four UN-protected areas in Croatia, but the only one under mixed Croat/Serb administration). The programme was formulated at the request of UNPROFOR following disengagement by both sides and the subsequent withdrawal of heavy weaponry from the sector. Here, it was reasoned, where Serbs and Croats once lived alongside one another, was an ideal place for such a scheme to be launched.

The idea was to address both the social needs of the people and the physical reconstruction of their environment. In the area of social welfare, special emphasis is being placed on the young, the elderly and women, through home visitation schemes, bereavement counselling and the building of youth centres. The reconstruction schemes target war-damaged housing and other infrastructural problems. A $2 million contribution from the Government of Austria has been complemented by a similar sum from a variety of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including CARE Austria.

"The aim is to reintroduce some of the normal conditions of life to the area, to decrease tensions and to provide hope for the future," explained Michael Platzer, who heads the social reconstruction programme. "I believe it has already helped people realize there is an alternative to war."

Looking around at the destruction of Pakrac, it is difficult to believe that this was once a bustling town of 12,000 people, where Serbs and Croats lived side by side. Not only did the two ethnic groups reside on the same streets; many shared houses. In fact, Pakrac was known to have one of the highest rates of mixed marriages in the whole of Croatia — up to a third were between Croats and Serbs.

The programme has set ambitious goals: to mend the shredded social fabric of the area, to raise the morale of those who have suffered, to create employment opportunities and to promote the resettlement of displaced Croats and Serbs. It is hoped that reconciliation at the community level can help to achieve a lasting solution to the deeply rooted problems of the country.

From the outset it was evident that the whole of Sector West could not be covered. Rather it was decided to concentrate first on the municipal areas of Pakrac and nearby Okucani. Lessons learned here, it was hoped, could be applied elsewhere.

Indeed, using Sector West as a model, UNDP and the UNOV embarked on a similar reconstruction programme last summer in the devastated central Bosnian town of Gornji Vakuf.

akrac was perhaps the most severely damaged of all Croatia's towns. A quarter of its homes were completely destroyed during the 1991 war and, two and a half years later, more than half of these houses are still uninhabitable. The emptiness of the streets bears testimony to the fact that as many as 500 people died in the street-to-street fighting and artillery shelling of the town. Most of the population fled.

"By January 1992, there were only 150 civilians left in Pakrac," said Vladimir Delac, Pakrac's mayor and coordinator of civilian affairs in Sector West. "There were about 100 Serbs and 50 Croats, most of them old people who had refused to go. The town was completely in ruins. You couldn't drive through the streets because they were filled with

rubble. There was no electricity, no water, no gas, no sanitation."

But step by step, the infrastructure is being rebuilt. By last spring, about one-third of the buildings on the Croat side of town had been repaired and about 4,500 Croat civilians had returned, according to the mayor's best estimates. The town's biggest industry, a furniture factory which exported chairs to the United States and the United Kingdom, was almost totally destroyed in the war; by April it was once again working though at only a fraction of its capacity. A severely damaged textile factory that exported to Germany had reopened its doors to its mainly female workforce. Other factories employing locals, such as the glass factory in nearby Lipik, were also functioning again.

The mayor said that work on the land had resumed and that the town would soon be sending its agricultural produce down to the Dalmatian Coast.

All around the Croat side of Pakrac were the sights and sounds of rebuilding: workmen with pneumatic drills laying new water pipes; a band serenading a newly married couple with traditional Croatian songs; teenagers laughing in the school yard. A number of shops, including a grocery, pharmacy and clothing store, were open for business. And in every street there was at least one bar or cafe.

But if life was slowly but erratically resuming its course on the Croat side of Pakrac last spring, the situation in Serbian Gavrinica was less evidently promising. Food was in shorter supply and the people were in need of clothing and footwear.

"Life here is difficult," said Obrad Ivanovic, Gavrinica's mayor. "We have no industry and our agricultural production capacity has been badly affected. People have lost their livestock and there is no fertilizer or seeds. We have still got our forests, but no sawmill."

Pakrac's reservoir lies on the Gavrinica side. But for a long time the Serbs had no electricity, and no means of pumping the water. For its part, the Croat population had electricity but not enough water. One of UNDP's current challenges is forging a water-for-electricity exchange. As of last April, relations between the two sides were still too tense for the project to go forward.

Despite such roadblocks, Ivanovic regarded the reconstruction of houses in the town as an indication of people's belief that things can change.

"One thing is certain," said Ivanovic. "The UN is playing a crucial role in the resolution of this conflict. The reconstruction programme enables people to think about work and how to create something for the future. This was once a rich agricultural area and the people were hard-working. It is not enough for people to eat, they must be active if they are to keep their sense of self-worth."

The physical reconstruction of Gavrinica depends heavily on the involvement of local people. Through a "bricks-for-work" scheme, for example, which is being carried out through CARE Austria, residents are encouraged to help in the repair of homes belonging to the elderly and the disabled. People engaged in fixing a municipal building or a neighbour's house get credit towards materials that they might need for their own properties. The current rate is seven bricks for one hour's work.

"We managed to get about 30 houses rebuilt by the fall of last year," said Mladen Kulic, a local resident and manager of the reconstruction programme in Gavrinica. "We hope to have more than one hundred finished by the end of 1994."

The centre of the programme is a bullet-riddled warehouse filled with building materials: cement, timber, glass and corrugated iron sheeting. The local labourers are being assisted by young volunteers who have been recruited by a European student network.

In April, a team was preparing to start work on the house of Savo and Anka Zestic, an elderly Serb couple living near the UN checkpoint. Most of their home burned down in July 1992 and, since returning to Gavrinica, they had been

David Orr / UNDP

A UN-patrolled buffer zone separates Serb and Croat sides of Pakrac.

living in two back rooms without water or electricity.

On the Croat side the sounds of sawing and hammering were becoming more frequent. One project which was drawing the interest of young people was the conversion of an old building on the main shopping street into a youth centre. The labour was being supplied by international volunteers and students enrolled in a construction course in the local secondary school.

"It's pretty boring for young people here," said 15-year-old Drazen Veltruski, one of the boys helping with the centre. "Before the war we had the cinema and we could go wherever we liked in town. But quite a few of our friends are on the other side now."

For the elderly as for the young, the quality of life has been severely diminished by the war and its numbing aftereffects. And with the departure of so many people from the community, the informal support network that sustained those less able to fend for themselves quickly crumbled. Many can no longer rely on visiting neighbours to help with chores, run errands or simply spend the time of day.

In conjunction with Help Age International, an NGO based in London, the UN is supporting a successful home visitation scheme in the Gavrinica area. As of last spring, 270 elderly people were being visited weekly or even more frequently by locally recruited housewives.

The role of volunteers is crucial to every aspect of the programme in Sector West. Most of the work, except for that subcontracted to CARE, is carried out by people who have offered their services for little or no remuneration.

A survey of the needs of the elderly, for example, is being conducted by volunteers from countries including Poland, France and the United Kingdom, most of whom have mastered a command of the Croatian language. When fully operational, the programme will be tailored to meet individual needs. In some cases it will function as a regular visitation service, in others it will provide home care or help with minor repairs.

The manager of the social reconstruction programme in Sector West is a community social worker, Annette O'Gorman, whose previous assignment was in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. She firmly believes in tackling the problems of a group rather than individuals. Her approach is motivated not only by the scale of suffering but also by the nature of the society, which is made up of tight-knit, largely rural communities bound by common concerns and values.

Nowhere has the group format proved more successful than in bereavement counselling for women in Gavrinica. Each week, a group of 15 widows meets with O'Gorman in the local primary school to share their grief and discuss common problems.

"Our meetings help me a lot," said Jelka Gaskovic, a 49-year-old woman who lost first her son and then her husband. "After their deaths I thought I'd never be able to go on. Now I can see I'm not the only one in this position."

Tears welled up in her eyes as she went through snapshots of her son taken before he took up arms for the Serb cause. He was killed while on mission to a Croat village in December 1991. Soon afterwards, fighting broke out in their village, Subocka, and their home was destroyed. She and her husband moved for a while to Belgrade. But after her husband returned to his unit in Subocka, Gaskovic went back to join him. In March 1992, her husband died of a heart attack. His widow believes it was the stress of the war and the grief of losing a son that killed him.

"Our house and the graves of my son and husband are in the Serb area of Subocka," she said. "One day I hope I will be able to return there. But for the moment it is impossible."

While the physical damage sustained by Pakrac and the other towns in Croatia is easy enough to assess, the suffering of its people is not so readily quantifiable. Almost everyone in Pakrac has lost a friend or a relative. Most have had their homes damaged and their livelihoods devastated.

"The greatest destruction has been of human souls and of people's minds," admitted Vladimir Delac, the mayor of Pakrac. "To live for three years under the burden of war creates terrible psychological problems."

To be able to talk about suffering is in itself a form of release. But there are some who dare not give voice to their sorrow in public. After 35 years of marriage, Raiko and Olgica Kovacevic still love each other. Both wear gold wedding bands on their fingers. Yet the last time they met was in November 1992. He is a Serb and she is a Croat. At the outbreak of war he was forced to flee the family home in Pakrac and now lives alone in the house where he was born just outside Gavrinica.

"It is unbelievable what has happened here," said Olgica. "Who could have foreseen a situation like this? It would be impossible for my husband to join me even though he had no part in what happened. All the Serbs are seen as guilty here. Even some of my neighbours give me a bad time for being married to one."

Raiko and Olgica both believe they will one day be reunited, but neither can predict when that will be. Neither is getting any younger and Raiko is not in good health.

Their tragedy is that of Croatia – two peoples who cohabited peacefully now set cruelly against one another. There is hope in Pakrac and elsewhere that time will heal. But despite the efforts being made through the rebuilding of both communities, no one knows how long that might take.

One of the plans drawn up under the reconstruction programme is a pathway – called the Road of Hope – between the Croat and Serb sides in Pakrac. But as of last spring, the road was deserted and blocked off at either end. Hope was, in the words of one local, still on hold. ■

Irish journalist David Orr writes for The Observer *and other publications. He is based in London.*

A Health Initiative that Starts in the Schools

Jasikan, Ghana – Few maps trace the meandering path of the Odomi stream: down the verdant mountainside of eastern Ghana, through the town of Jasikan and into Lake Volta. But though its shallow waters have eluded cartographers, the Odomi remains a prominent feature of the local landscape. For more than a thousand residents of the *zongo*, a Muslim neighbourhood on the edge of town, it is the only source of water for bathing, laundering, cooking and drinking.

The Odomi, like many tropical waterways, is also a wellspring of disease. It teems with parasitic worms that are transmitted through excreta, contaminated water, food, soil and insects. The worms penetrate the skin or enter the digestive tract and can stunt the physical growth – and possibly the mental development – of children. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that parasitic worms contribute to the death of up to 100,000 school-age children (5 to 14 years old) each year.

Protecting the health and well-being of these youngsters is the focus of a "Partnership for Child Development" sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), WHO and three private US foundations. The Partnership is studying a "health package" that is administered through schools and includes treatment for parasitic worms, health education and supplements for micro-nutrient deficiencies. Lack of iron, iodine and vitamin A are common causes of "hidden hunger" and can lead to retarded growth, blindness, mental retardation and other serious disorders. The cost of the package? About US$1 a year per child.

Currently, the Partnership programme is providing treatment to 100,000 schoolchildren in each of four countries – Colombia, Indonesia, Tanzania and in the Lake Volta region of Ghana. Teachers and health workers are also instructing students in hygiene to prevent further worm infestation, and encouraging them to eat a healthy diet.

By targeting children, the programme also reaches the wider community. Large-scale studies have indicated that school-age children are a significant source of infection to a community as a whole. Thus, treating children should reduce infection rates overall. And children have shown themselves to be remarkably effective as "agents of change."

"The Partnership idea is premised on child-to-child communication within a group," says Tim Rothermel, director of UNDP's science, technology, and private sector division, "children teaching other children and helping their younger brothers and sisters."

– Christopher Reardon

The Odomi stream: a source of life and wellspring of disease.

Christopher Reardon / UNDP

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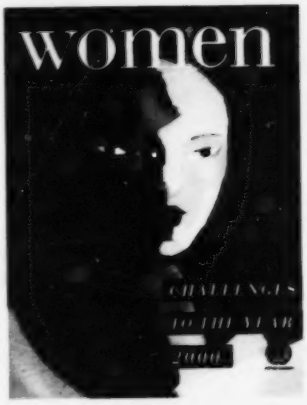
women

Still knocking on the door of equality



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